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Protecting Our Children

What We Are Learning

David Shumate

**Developing an Effective Child
Protection Policy**

How Could It Ever Be for My Good?

Claudia Barba



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Protecting Our Children



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What We Are Learning

FRED IS THE SENIOR PASTOR OF SMALL CHURCH IN THE MIDWEST. One Sunday between Sunday school and church a teen Sunday school helper comes to Fred and says that she just walked into a classroom and saw a teacher alone with an eleven-year-old girl and that the teacher was fondling the girl's buttocks.



Fred's first reaction is incredulity—how could something like this happen here, in a Bible-believing church that encourages high standards of personal moral conduct and genuine love for the Lord? Moreover, the teacher in question has been an upstanding member of the church for several years. He's a family man and has an excellent reputation in the community. He isn't weird. You couldn't imagine this man hanging around playgrounds in a trench coat looking for child victims. Surely this must be just a misunderstanding.

With his stomach churning, Fred decides to talk to the teacher. In the interview the teacher at first says that they were "just playing" and that he is sorry for any embarrassment it might have caused. When Fred confronts him with more details about what the teen witness reported, the teacher begins to break down. He confesses that he had a "rough background," that as a boy he had been introduced to different kinds of sexual "experimentation" by an adult relative. Nevertheless he assures Fred that after he was saved and got married he had experienced real victory. Recently, though, he had become discouraged through some problems at work, and it just so happened that he was that very morning tempted when he found the girl alone in the room. He said that he touched her once, but that was all. He had been under conviction about what he was doing and was just about to stop when the teenager came in. He says that he would be glad to apologize to the girl and her family. He seems contrite.

Fred is vaguely aware that he may have a duty to report this to the authorities, but he wishes that he didn't have to. After all, the teacher hadn't "gone very far" with the child. It wasn't as serious as it could have been. Fred imagines the police showing up at the teacher's house and leading him away in handcuffs while his wife and children watch in horror and the local TV station films the whole thing. This is a conservative community, and the thought that there might be a pedophile in the church would destroy its ministry. Since the teacher is really sorry, perhaps it is something that could best be handled internally. . . .

In this hypothetical scenario Fred is laboring under some extremely grave misconceptions that virtually guarantee an improper response to a very serious situation.

Misconception 1: It can't happen here.

Fred knows that child sexual abuse happens, but he is ignorant of how widespread it is. Credible evidence indicates that perhaps as many as one in four girls and one in five boys have suffered some form of sexual abuse.* This is an evil of epidemic proportions. Not only that, but it has taken place in all kinds of institutions, public and private, including churches of every stripe. Many people have the idea that this is something that happens "somewhere else," in another socioeconomic demographic or in other kinds of belief systems but certainly not in Bible-believing churches. This false sense of security is very dangerous because it causes churches and leaders to drop their guard and fail to put commonsense policies in place that can help deter



PROTECTING THE FLOCK

... appropriate action includes implementing a prevention and response plan that has elements such as screening workers, setting and enforcing behavioral boundaries, and training people in the church to detect and respond appropriately to potential or suspected abuse.

abuse. Even though the many news stories about child sexual abuse show that it can happen anywhere, we still do not quite believe it can happen here.

Misconception 2: Acts that do not involve actual intercourse are not “so bad.”

Although the legal definition of child molestation varies from state to state, it is fair to say that in general a good definition of child sexual abuse is any act directed toward a child that is sexual in nature or has sexual intent. It is certainly true that some violations are more egregious than others. Nevertheless, child sexual abuse does not necessarily require touching but can involve exposing oneself to a child, showing pornography to a child, or other similar practices. Related to this misconception is the tendency to underestimate the harm done to victims of sexual abuse. Nevertheless, just because the emotional and spiritual scars that sexual abuse leaves are not visible, that does not mean that they are not long-lasting and deeply painful to the victim, who feels betrayed, unloved, and helpless. It is a profound evil and injustice that is done by those who have a responsibility to protect the weak and dependent ones but who instead perversely abuse them. The sense of injustice is magnified if those with the opportunity to take preventive and corrective action fail to do so.

Misconception 3: Child sexual abusers have a certain look about them—they’re “weirdoes.”

What may come as a surprise to many is the fact that, as some authorities have put it, child molesters “look just like us.” Apart from their being predominantly (although not exclusively) male, child molesters as a group reflect many of the demographic characteristics of the rest of the population. They come from all socio-economic backgrounds. They may be married and have families. They are also as likely as the general population to express a religious preference. In other words, there are not recognizable characteristics that can be discerned by the casual observer. Sexual abusers of children, therefore, often are able to gain access to potential victims by gaining the trust of parents and others who control that access. This leads to the consideration of another serious misconception.

Misconception 4: A professing believer who commits this kind of abuse must have just fallen in a moment of weakness.

The teacher in our opening illustration represented to his pastor that he had been saved from an earlier life of sexual sin but that since his conversion he had lived in victory until recent pressures caused a momentary partial relapse. The pastor must treat this claim with a great deal of skepticism. Although it is impossible to say that such a situation could never occur, those who deal regularly with abusers say that they are often very skilled in manipulation and deceit. Rather than just falling into it, many abusers plan out how they will gain access to potential victims. In the vast majority of cases, the victim knows the offender before the abuse occurs. Child molesters also typically offend multiple times over an extended period. In order to gain access to children and to keep from

getting caught, child molesters typically manipulate and deceive both their victims and the adults who watch over them. In addition, there are many cases in which child sexual abusers use religion to gain access to potential victims and to shield themselves from accountability.

Misconception 5: The requirement to report abuse interferes with the ministry of the church, and things are best handled internally, at least in the beginning.

Many churches and other institutions alike have made the mistake of investigating suspected abuse internally before deciding whether to call the authorities. This response at first may seem to make sense as a way of preventing a false report. Nevertheless, there are several things seriously wrong with approach.

First, it does not take into account the manipulative character of the average child sexual abuser and the vulnerability of the victim. Many abusers use shame, bribery, threats, and deceit to keep their victims from telling. The abuser may be a respected adult and may even be in authority in the church or other institution. On the other hand, victims are usually very reluctant to tell. They are often cowed by the offender and embarrassed to talk about what happened. Given these facts it is not realistic to expect that an untrained investigator will be able to get the entire truth.

Second, while for the purpose of church discipline the church should seek to discern the facts, abusive acts are not just sins; they are also crimes. God has delegated to the government the responsibility to bring evildoers to justice (Rom. 13:3, 4). Therefore believers must cooperate with law enforcement efforts.

The government has determined that suspected abuse should be investigated by trained law enforcement personnel or other state officials rather than private persons or institutions. This should actually come as a relief to churches, which have neither the mandate nor the tools to mete out justice. The church and the state have different roles in the situation. The church's job is to represent Jesus Christ by acting righteously and speaking the truth. It represents the forgiveness that is available in Christ, but it also must accurately represent the true nature of repentance, restitution, and restoration. The state's job is to determine guilt and to punish criminals. An internal investigation can interfere with proper justice. If the accused is warned of a potential criminal investigation, he or she may destroy evidence, intimidate witnesses, or even flee. Our desire to keep the initial investigation private may also reflect a serious misunderstanding concerning the testimony of the church. This is the next misconception.

Misconception 6: The testimony of the church will be destroyed if we acknowledge that abuse can occur or has occurred in our church.

This is both a spiritual and a practical error. It is a crucial spiritual error in that it confuses testimony with reputation. Our testimony is how we publicly represent Jesus Christ and His truth. Our reputation is what people think about us. We are responsible only for the former; the latter

is beyond our control. Jesus Christ suffered as an evildoer even though He never sinned and always properly represented the Father. The desire to protect our reputations can lead first to the denial of the potential for abuse in our ministry. This denial is fatal because we close our eyes to the danger and fail to prepare for it. A second consequence of this testimony/reputation inversion is that it can create a temptation to minimize, keep quiet about, or even actively cover up suspected or actual abuse.

There is also a very serious practical misunderstanding here. It has become increasingly well established that child sexual predators have been able to get into many different kinds of institutions. Although it is possible to reduce the risk, a case of abuse within a church does not necessarily mean that the church did anything wrong or that it "fostered a climate of abuse." Where institutions typically get into trouble is when they fail to act properly on what they know or reasonably suspect. Therefore, ignoring the potential problem and doing nothing to develop a prevention system is justly subject to censure. And failing to deal appropriately with suspected and known cases of abuse causes the very harm to a ministry's testimony that the leaders tried to avoid.

There are many other misconceptions that we could consider concerning child sexual abuse. However, we also must consider what should be done in response.

First Response: We must educate ourselves.

The misconceptions above and many others as well are correctible through information that is readily available. Many pastors and other ministry leaders should become better acquainted with the various aspects of this problem, including its scope and nature, the characteristics of child molesters, your state's reporting requirements, and the effects of abuse on victims. There are many resources now available on the Internet and elsewhere.

In addition, we must take advantage of the knowledge and skills of people within our congregations. One difficulty in many churches is that the pastor is expected to be the expert on everything. To the contrary, God's intention is that the body of Christ should benefit from the participation of all the members. Churches have members and leaders with valuable knowledge and experience, such as schoolteachers, law enforcement personnel, legal professionals, and private and public social service personnel. Many of these have had some sort of training in dealing with this issue and some members could be tasked with the responsibility on behalf of the church to do the necessary research and make recommendations to the church leadership about appropriate preventive measures.

Second Response: We must acknowledge and learn from past failures.

As in other ministry areas, a sober assessment of the crisis may also lead us to the conclusion that we mishandled certain situations in the past. A past decision about how to handle a situation, even if it was made in good faith, may now cause regret in light of the resulting consequences. If we have made mistakes, we should own them honestly, ask forgiveness for them where appropriate, and do what

we can to ameliorate their consequences. If we realize that we are currently dealing with a situation in the wrong way, then we must take rapid but thoughtful corrective action.

In addition to recognizing specific mistakes, we may have to acknowledge that we have failed to approach the overall problem with sufficient diligence or vigor. This is not to disregard those many individuals and ministries that have done good things in this area, including gathering information, instituting policies, reporting suspected abuse, and ministering to those injured by this sin. Nevertheless, the more we learn, the more many of us realize that we could have done better. The truth of the matter is that child sexual abuse touches virtually every institution in society. Moreover, as the news continues to demonstrate,

many people and institutions with reputations for integrity have failed to respond rightly in this area. Nevertheless, for the Bible-believing church to say that it has not responded any worse than other institutions is itself an indictment of we who believe that God has called us to be salt and light in the world. Certain groups, institutions, and denominations have gotten out in front on this issue. Although we are not in a competition, this fact should mobilize us in Fundamental churches to redouble our efforts as well.

As we discuss what needs to be changed, we should be careful not to spend too much of our time dwelling on the failures of other individuals or institutions. This is not to say that we should not hold ourselves accountable and that we cannot learn from the past failures of others. Nevertheless, we must avoid the trap of thinking about child sexual abuse as though it were someone else's problem.

Instead we must focus our principal energies in determining how our churches and other ministries can better protect children and in helping others do the same.

Third Response: We must implement appropriate prevention and response strategies.

Becoming better informed about child sexual abuse leads to some disturbing thoughts. Chief among these is the idea that a child molester could be in the pew next to us. Frankly, this is frightening. However, there is constructive fear and there is destructive fear. On the one hand, destructive, carnal fear can lead to denial, panic, and bad decisions. Sometimes it causes us to ignore a danger we are afraid to face. Other times it leads to seemingly self-protective behaviors that make matters worse. On the other hand, Biblical, constructive fear motivates us to deal with the problem. Noah obeyed God, being moved by reverent fear because he believed God's warning of pending judg-

ment (Heb. 11:7). The prudent person sees the disaster coming and "hideth himself" (Prov. 22:3). Constructive fear acknowledges the truth, assesses the danger, and takes appropriate action.

In this case, appropriate action includes implementing a prevention and response plan that has elements such as screening workers, setting and enforcing behavioral boundaries, and training people in the church to detect and respond appropriately to potential or suspected abuse. In addition we must be better prepared to minister to the many victims of child sexual abuse (both children and adults) and to confront and help bring to genuine repentance those who have committed such acts.

The Purpose of this Issue of FrontLine

All of this is a tall order, and understaffed churches and overwhelmed pastors are not likely to invest the necessary time or energy without a sense of the urgency and gravity of this evil. The interview with Rachel Mitchell in this issue of *FrontLine* should be very useful in this regard. She is the Chief of the Sex Crimes Bureau for the Maricopa County, Arizona, Attorney's Office and has taught extensively in this field. Her insights are extremely helpful for gaining an understanding of the true nature and seriousness of the threat to churches as well as for taking basic steps to protect our children and our ministries. In addition to this interview, there is a section in this issue giving advice and resources concerning the development of a child sexual abuse prevention policy in your church. Also, Dr. Jim Berg provides some important Biblical insights for helping people who have been victimized.

Some of the information and counsel offered here is well established among those who deal regularly with this subject. Other aspects of the problem need more investigation. We confess that the more we learn about this topic, the more we need to learn. The resources provided in this issue should be just the beginning of your investigation.

Jesus Christ commanded His disciples to allow the little children to come to Him. He also pronounced the severest of woes on those who put a stumbling block in their way. Let us purpose by the Lord's help that we will be those who obey the former instead of those who allow the latter.

Dr. David Shumate holds advanced degrees in law and theology. He has served as an associate pastor and seminary professor. He is currently the director of a mission agency located in Phoenix, Arizona.



* See the interview with Rachel Mitchell on the next page.



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Interview with Rachel Mitchell

Rachel Mitchell is the Sex Crimes Bureau Chief of the Maricopa County Attorney's Office in Phoenix, Arizona. She has extensive knowledge of the field of child sexual abuse in general as well as its impact on religious organizations. On November 3, 2011, Ms. Mitchell gave a lengthy telephone interview with *FrontLine* magazine. Below are extensive excerpts from that interview.

FrontLine: Thank you very much for speaking with us.

Rachel Mitchell: You're welcome. It is my pleasure.

FL: How long have you been with the Maricopa County Attorney's Office?

RM: Nineteen years.

FL: You are currently the Bureau Chief of the Sex Crimes Bureau. About what percentage of the Bureau's workload involves sexual offenses against children?

RM: I would say somewhere between sixty and seventy percent.

FL: What kinds of activities are you involved in to help with prevention?

RM: Individually I work with lots of different churches and denominations by educating them and raising their awareness. I have also taught organizations such as schools and churches on the Arizona mandatory reporting law. That is not necessarily just prevention but response too. We also go out as a bureau to educate parents and kids on safety issues, including online safety issues.

FL: Do you find that churches and other religious institutions are generally receptive to your message?

RM: It is a very individual thing. Some churches are very receptive to the teaching. With some churches you get the sense that people are there because they have to be. Usually, though, when they hear the information that we provide, they do respond positively. Some churches are not interested in it. It is a very individual thing.

FL: Do you think you can explain why some churches or other religious organizations might not be receptive to your message?

RM: I think the first level is that people have the mistaken beliefs that make it difficult for them to grasp that child sexual abuse can happen in a church. One of these is the idea that abuse is typically committed by strangers. Another misconception is that you can identify these people, that there is a look of sorts. That is one problem, not being aware that it could happen.

The second problem is that some churches are very

concerned about protecting their reputation, and so they do not want to acknowledge that they could be vulnerable. This is not unique to churches; it is common even in individuals. If we do not want to acknowledge that there is a possibility, then let's just ignore it. That is just not realistic. Unfortunately the wake-up call for a lot of organizations, not just churches, is a lawsuit. Typically when people get sued over this, it is not because there is a problem, but because they find out about the problem and they ignore it.

FL: Apart from the age of their victims and nature of their crimes, are there significant differences between child sexual offenders and other kinds of offenders?

RM: I would say yes. A lot of crimes involve individuals acting out of very basic urges such as greed or even desperation, as in the case of addictions. These types of cases are fairly straightforward: they steal a car or they rob a business. There is no manipulation involved. On the other hand, child sexual offenders are typically very manipulative. Children are picked out because they are vulnerable. Typically there is a great deal of planning that goes into molesting a child. The offender is looking for a child who is first of all vulnerable in that they are not going to tell, or if they tell they are not going to be believed or appropriate actions are not going to be taken. That is a lot more planning and manipulation than the average criminal does.

FL: There seems to be a strong and growing consensus that child molestation is a very common and widespread evil. What is your sense as to the prevalence of the problem?

RM: Statistics often cited are that one in four girls and one in five boys have been sexually abused. Statistics can change depending on how you define sexual abuse, but I believe that there has been some pretty good research,

... people have the mistaken beliefs that make it difficult for them to grasp that child sexual abuse can happen in a church.

retrospectively interviewing people as to whether they were molested and whether they ever told. I think that has given us a pretty good picture that it is very prevalent, justifying in general terms those one-in-four and one-in-five numbers.

FL: Are there common misconceptions about sexual offenses and offenders against children? If so, what are some of the most significant?

RM: First, I would say the largest misconception is that "stranger danger" is the rule rather than the fairly rare exception. About 90–95% of victims know the person who is offending against them.

Second, a very common misconception relates to when

and how children tell. People think that children would tell right away and that they would tell everything that happened to them. In reality children often keep this secret for years, sometimes into their adulthood, sometimes forever. And they may or they may not tell everything. They may partially disclose to see how people are going to react to them. "I'll tell you the least embarrassing thing first, and I'm going to see whether you are going to get mad at me or whether you are going to help me. Then, if I get a positive response, I may tell some more."

Third, there is a perception that this happens in secret, but the reality is that it frequently happens with others present in the same house and often in the same room. There was a study where they interviewed offenders about this specific issue. What they found was that 54.9% had molested with another child present. It is an excellent "grooming" technique because it is telling the child watching, "This other child is being molested and is not telling and no one is helping that child, so when I molest you next you shouldn't tell, and nobody is going to help you either." Twenty-three point nine percent molested with another adult present, and that is effective because if the child thinks that the other adult is aware, whether or not the adult is aware of what is going on, then the child, depending on the parental education the child has received, may think that the behavior is OK or may think that no one is going to help them. Then 14.2% molested with both an adult and another child present. So it is a very common thing.

Fourth, another huge misconception that I see is that [sexual offenders do not consider] child pornography . . . [to be] that serious, and that some people do not see that as [representing] an actual victim. In reality child pornography, whether a picture or a video, is an image of a child being sexually abused. Also, even the mere possession of child pornography is highly correlated with a person acting out against a child. The Butner study talks about people who were sentenced for child pornography offenses alone, and after their cases were adjudicated and they were being treated, the number of hands-on victims was staggering. So it is highly correlated to hands-on offending. It is not a victimless crime. It is not uncommon for offenders to possess commercial pornography and create pornography themselves.

Fifth, it is important to understand that demographically sexual offenders are about the same as the general

population when it comes to having a religious preference. In fact they look like us. Demographically they are very similar to the general population. Economically, educationally, racially, religiously, they are demographically the same.

FL: A clinical psychologist who works with sex offenders commented that even after twenty years of study she cannot spot a child molester from casual observation.

RM: Right, because as part of their manipulation they manipulate those around them. It is not just the child that is manipulated; it is everybody around. And so what you're seeing in a sex offender is a façade, and you don't realize that.

FL: You have said that child molesters "use religion." Could you explain what you mean? How do they do this?

RM: They use religion in a number of different ways, and this goes back to the manipulative quality. It [church] is a good place to access children and to gain the trust of both the children and the parents. Oftentimes just gaining the trust of the parents is all you need to gain access to the children. The church is going to be more skeptical about any abuse reported because they trust the accused. Also, the community as a whole will trust a person more because they are a "good church-going person." There are more opportunities to isolate a child in a church because there are nooks and crannies in the facility where the offender can be alone with a child.

Sometimes offenders will use religion in a more direct way. I have seen them blame their religious upbringing for their being sexually deviant, saying, "I was brought up sexually repressed, and so this thing that I have done is an attempt to break free of that repression." They might blame God for their offenses, saying, "If I wasn't supposed to do



this, then why did God put this person in my pathway." I have seen some engage in more mysticism, where they will say that they have special powers or special knowledge and a special "in" with God, the hierarchy of the church, and that sort of thing. They will use that special "in" to intimidate or silence the victims.

Finally, if they do get caught, they will use churches to get character witnesses to testify on their behalf, to speak on their behalf at sentencing and that kind of thing.

FL: Do you think that it is possible through appropriate training to learn to spot a likely child molester? Why or why not?

RM: As I said before, there is not a "look" that identifies someone as potentially a child molester. However there are red flags. This is where churches need to rethink policies. I think that a lot of churches have policies, such as "do not be alone in a room with a child," that are designed to protect against false accusations. I think policies are very important to set boundaries, not primarily to prevent false accusations, although I think that they will have that side effect. Policies set boundaries. And when you have boundaries and people violate the boundaries, it gives you the authority to handle it. It is black and white: "You volunteered to work at the church. You read the policy and signed that you understood it. Every year we sign that we understand it, so that it is not just something that is in the past. And you were told that you were not to have sleepovers at your house. You violated that policy." The normal person is going to be horrified and chastened and is not going to do it again. When you start to see violations of other boundaries, it does not necessarily mean that something is going to happen, but it is a very big red flag. The policy gives you the authority to handle it. There is no argument about whether the worker understood that it was OK or not. It is black and white. So I think that policies are great to set boundaries.

One set of boundaries that needs to be set in this day and age involves technology. One place where trouble seems to happen is subgroups, for example where youth ministers start friending kids on their personal Facebook pages, and the kids list them on their Facebook pages. If you want to have a Bible study Facebook page where you talk as a Bible study group or you post announcements of activities and the church is aware of it and sanctions it, that is one thing, but if you have a subgroup of kids that kind of hang out with the Bible study teacher or youth minister, that is asking for trouble—both because this kind of situation increases the risk of false accusations and because it is an important boundary violation.

FL: Is it possible and advisable to train children to protect themselves?

RM: I do think that you have to teach children about how to protect themselves from strangers, such as to not go with a stranger. I think we are pretty good at doing the "stranger danger stuff," but how do you teach a child to be careful around everybody else that the child knows?



I think we are pretty good at doing the "stranger danger stuff," but how do you teach a child to be careful around everybody else that the child knows?

Instead you need to focus on teaching the child to tell you if something happens. First of all you teach a child the right name for body parts, because if the child cannot communicate what happened to him or her, they cannot report. You need to tell a child what their private parts are for and "if anyone touches you there, you need to tell me right away, and you are not going to be in any trouble, but I need to know. And if anybody makes you feel uncomfortable, even if they have not done that kind of thing, you need to tell me that they make you feel uncomfortable." If you cannot talk about it, neither can your child. It does not have to be done in a horrific or graphic way, but keeping quiet about it with your child is keeping your child vulnerable.

FL: What are the most important things that churches and other religious organizations can do to protect their children from sexual predators?

RM: (1) Have a policy that addresses boundaries and mandatory reporting law. Every state has a mandatory reporting law. Insist on compliance with that law. In the policy, make sure to include boundaries that relate to social networking and that kind of thing.

(2) Have background checks. Most sexual offenders that I handle do not have a criminal record of sex offending, but a background check does deter people who do have a record from applying. Background checks also send the signal that we are taking this seriously.

(3) Also, and this is the big one, educate as far as awareness that it happens and what is the appropriate response. You cannot prevent this from happening one hundred percent of the time, but you can respond appropriately so that it does not happen again.

FL: Among children's workers there seems to be a common anxiety about being falsely suspected or accused of being a child molester. Do you think that this fear is justified?

RM: I think it is a common fear, but I do not think it is a justifiable fear. False accusations are very rare. Also a boundaries policy in the church does a double job; it alerts you to problems, but it also protects you from this. The reality is that the authorities, if they are brought in to investigate, can weed out false accusations, and the criminal justice system can do that. No one can be found guilty unless they plead guilty or are found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. It requires evidence. It would be wrong for me to say that no one has ever been arrested who wasn't guilty, but the reality is that if common-sense principles are followed, the likelihood of a false accusation even going to that point is very low.

FL: *What are some common mistakes people in general and churches in particular make in responding to suspicions of sexual abuse of children?*

RM: I think one of the big mistakes that they make is that they handle it internally. They "circle the wagons," and they conduct their own internal investigation. They notify the accused of the allegation. What that does is it thwarts a lot of opportunities for a thorough investigation that is done by trained authorities. It muddies the waters as far as people sharing information when it should be kept pristine as far as what people know and how they found out. When they notify the accused, if the accused is guilty, it gives him or her the opportunity to destroy evidence, influence witnesses, or flee. I guess the worst thing a church could do is to blame the victim or at least partially blame the victim, and then cover up. So those would be huge mistakes by the church.

FL: *Many recommend that the instant there is an accusation you need to immediately remove the accused from their ministries involving children. Is there any tension between the church's duty to do so and law enforcement's desire that the accused not be tipped off?*

RM: That can be tricky because law enforcement has to be cognizant that churches need to protect themselves by responding in an administratively appropriate manner. In those situations where the church is saying, "We can't let him walk back into that Bible study," for example, they need to advise law enforcement that the church needs to act quickly on this, giving law enforcement the chance to speed up their investigation. So that is going to require communication and cooperation between the church and law enforcement.

FL: *Would you recommend beforehand that churches should identify someone in law enforcement that they can contact if there is a problem?*

RM: I think it would be a really good idea to introduce yourself to the sergeant or lieutenant over child crimes in your jurisdiction and say, "We want to work with you."

FL: *From your perspective, do you think that it is possible for churches and church leaders inadvertently to send the wrong message to victims of childhood sexual abuse?*

RM: They need to view the victim as a victim. They should not treat the victim as co-responsible. That is not a fair way to look at the situation. Also, if it is wrongly judged as a sinful relationship on the victim's part, for example if the church teaches against homosexuality, and if it is a male-

on-male or a female-on-female offense, it would be inappropriate to reinforce in the mind of the victim that they have somehow done something wrong.

FL: *If there was one thing that you could tell church leaders on this subject, what would it be?*

RM: You can deal with this now by putting together a prevention and response strategy, or you can deal with it in a time of crisis when you are fighting a fire. The church needs to know that it can happen, and you need to deal with it now.



Fundamental Baptist
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Growing in Grace

***"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of
our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."***

|| Peter 3:18

June 12–14, 2012

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

- Steve Pettit
- Marty Marriott
- Kevin Schaal
- Mark Minnick
- James Maxwell
- Jim Berg
- Mike Sproul

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Developing an Effective Child Protection Policy

Every church or other ministry ought to adopt a policy to help prevent child sexual abuse. Here are some ideas that can help with this process.

Tailoring a Policy for Your Ministry

Although there are many model policies available, it is important that a church develop a policy that it can implement effectively. In order to accomplish this you should invite key ministry leaders and workers to help in the process of crafting the policy. Their involvement is important for several reasons.

1. It helps achieve “buy in.” If the people of the church, and especially those who work with children, are not convinced of the need for and value of an effective policy, both the plan’s adoption and its implementation will be jeopardized. Remember that the plan is not simply “window dressing.” It will help to protect children from abuse only if it actually affects the way the church operates. If the key leaders are not enthusiastic, even a well-crafted plan will not be effective because it will not be fully carried out.
2. It helps ensure that the plan is actually workable in the regular functioning of the ministry. For the plan to work the church leaders and volunteers need to be able to work the plan. The policy must take into account the church’s size, the composition of the congregation, the layout of the facilities, and the structure of the children’s and youth ministries. A plan that is not followed is actually worse than no plan because it creates a false sense of security. Including representatives from different ministry areas, especially those who work with children, in the formulation of the policy, will ensure that the program is workable.
3. It provides a way to further develop and disciple church leaders and workers. Whenever God points out a ministry need, He is also providing an opportunity for His people to mature spiritually. Christ’s plan for His church is for it to grow by means of using the gifts of all the members. Many churches have individuals with specific training in this area, such as teachers, social workers, and police officers, to name a few. In addition, individuals who have organizational and other abilities could be involved as well. The working group should also have pastoral staff representation in order to maintain healthy spiritual direction and proper coordination with the ministry leadership.

Basic Elements of a Child Protection Policy

There is no universal standard for child abuse prevention policies. However, there are major elements that are regularly recommended by those who work in this area.

1. **Statement of purpose:** Here the church states its commitment to the protection of children and the prevention of child sexual abuse. Often this statement will refer to specific Biblical principles.
2. **Definitions:** Most sources recommend that the policy reproduce the definitions, including the definitions of different types of abuse, from state law where the ministry is located.
3. **This section indicates who is subject to the policies.** These usually include all paid staff as well as all volunteers who work with minors. In some cases this group may also include vendors and contractors, if their responsibilities bring them in close and regular contact with children.
4. **Worker selection:** This section addresses, among other things, qualifications for working with children, application and interview procedures, references, and background checks.

5. Training: Before working with children, staff and volunteers should be required to go through a specified initial training. In addition there is normally some form of periodic training and review requirements (such as yearly workers' in-service sessions and regular meetings).

6. Boundary policies: These are common-sense rules which all workers must agree to follow that set limits on their contact with children. They cover such matters as not being alone in private with a child, not having sleepovers at one's home, rules for social networking with children, and what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable physical contact.

7. Supervision: In addition to boundary policies, churches often put procedures in place for the oversight of children's ministries. Such procedures can include keeping unused rooms locked, maintaining clear sight-lines into all ministry spaces, setting a minimum ratio of workers to children, and providing for unannounced visits to classes and activities.

8. Response: This section sets forth the procedures for responding to suspected or alleged abuse. Such policies should establish reporting procedures and should include a reprinting of the state laws concerning mandatory and permissive reporters. In addition the policy should prohibit internal investigation and should provide rules for such things as the handling of information and protection of privacy, restriction from ministry involvement of the suspected abuser, and ministry to the victim and his or her family. This section needs to be especially well thought out, since responding to suspected abuse often involves significant legal, ethical, and spiritual responsibilities that are sometimes in tension with one another.

9. Ministry to sex offenders: If a church has the opportunity to minister to sex offenders, it should have a procedure that will ensure the safety of children in the ministry. Such policies should include, among other things, restrictions on the places where sex offenders can sit in the service or go within the facilities, an arrangement for trained chaperones to remain with the individual, and the prohibition of attendance if one of the offender's victims attends.

10. Acknowledgment: Every person subject to the policy should receive a copy of the policy and should acknowledge that he or she has read it and understands its terms. These written acknowledgments should be kept on file. This should be done before the person begins working with children and every year thereafter.

Helpful Resources and Information for Developing a Policy

There are many resources available for churches and other institutions to help them develop a child protection policy. Various websites contain model policies that can be adapted for the individual needs of a church. The following are some sources for information and model policies.

Several companies specialize in providing insurance coverage for churches. These companies have an interest in reducing potential claims against their clients. In addition, they have made policies and other resources available to the public through their websites. These policies are designed for churches. Three of these companies are

1. Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company: "Guidelines for Ministry Workers: Preventing Child Abuse in a Ministry Environment." This manual contains a sample policy as well as other forms and guidelines.
2. Church Mutual Insurance Company
3. Guide One Insurance Company

Various churches and other religious organizations have made policies available online.

1. The Baptist General Convention of Texas has developed a sample policy for Baptist churches.
2. The Catholic Diocese of Phoenix, Arizona, has written a policy manual with the cooperation of the Maricopa County Attorney's Bureau of Sex Crimes. The policy is very thorough. It is more complex, due to the diocese hierarchy, than would be necessary for independent churches or ministries. The policy is available in English and Spanish.
3. Reducing the Risk, a service of *Christianity Today*, provides various policy and training resources for purchase as well as free articles.
4. The Southern Baptist Convention website has a page of Local Church Resources. It includes a number of very helpful resources, including two presentations by Rachel Mitchell ("Creating a Safe Environment—An Arizona Convention Training Video for Church Leadership," Parts 1 and 2).

Many other churches and religious organizations have posted their child protection policies online. Other churches in your area may have policies that they would be willing for you to consult or to adapt for your ministry. Finally, you should consult one or two policies from secular organizations for comparison purposes.

Although it will involve planning and effort, developing a well-thought-out child protection policy that works for your church can help inform your congregation of the great need, provide significant protection for children in your congregation, and help grow spiritual leadership for the ministry.

Beauty for Ashes

NOTHING WEIGHS HEAVIER ON THE HEART OF A PASTOR or Christian counselor than the news that a child has been sexually molested. The thought that one of “these little ones” should be offended by an adult prompts a mixture of responses in a shepherd’s heart—stirrings of injustice, compassion, and intervention.

A thorough discussion of this topic would include identifying the categories of sexual abuse, key indicators of sexual abuse, the typical climate at home that often gives rise to sexual abuse, the perpetrator’s stages of grooming that lead to abuse, and so forth. The focus of this discussion will be to unpack a Biblical model that presents the main effects of sexual abuse on the sufferer. Knowledge of those effects will point the way to strategies for helping the sufferer to face the challenges in front of her in the days, months, and years ahead.¹

Since the inspired Word of God claims to provide everything necessary to prepare every child of God for useful service and joyful relationship with God (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:2, 3), we should expect a gracious God to provide a “corrective lens” to clarify our “vision” as we move toward a sufferer to offer help. We do, indeed, find such a lens in the extended account of Tamar’s rape by her half-brother Amnon in 2 Samuel 13:1–33.

God has given me the privilege to assist scores of young ladies (and the women counselors discipling them) in their journey to understand the impact of sexual abuse upon their own souls and to understand how to integrate these events into their story of God’s redemptive grace in their lives. Knowing from this passage of Scripture God’s perspective of the key issues they must face has given them a roadmap out of the hurt, anger, fear, and confusion.

Several factors determine the degree of impact upon the sufferer’s life: the amount of trust she had in the perpetrator, the amount of coercion and/or force used to obtain compliance, the number of incidences of the crime, the number of perpetrators involved, the response of adults when the abuse became known, and the extent of the offense itself (ranging from suggestive comments, exposing the child to pornography or lewd behavior, touching and fondling, intercourse, and exploitation—involving the child in live performances, including filming those acts, and prostitution).

In the interest of brevity, I will not recount the Biblical account in 2 Samuel 13, but only point out four God-highlighted effects of sexual abuse. Identifying them leads naturally to the divine remedies for countering them.

First, Tamar was *betrayed*; Amnon violated her *trust*.

Perpetrators of childhood sexual abuse are most often those the child should have been able to trust—her brother, uncle, cousin, father, neighbor, or staff member at church, school, or civic club. The perpetrator is a Judas, outwardly claiming to be a loyal member of the group but inwardly using that relationship for his own selfish ends. He is a betrayer.

Amnon betrayed Tamar by taking advantage of her kindness, her smaller strength, and her isolation. David, her father, betrayed her when he did not address the injustice, and Absalom, her real brother, betrayed her when he counseled her to keep the matter to herself and plotted revenge himself. Every one of the “protectors” in her life abandoned his duty.

Such betrayal breeds distrust in a girl’s heart. She can become suspicious and exhibit high demands for consistency (especially in leadership), a high degree of skepticism (determined never to be taken advantage of again), and a high degree of self-consciousness (constantly aware of her own vulnerabilities, inadequacies, failures, and on high alert to any possible harm that could come her way).

The greatest danger for most girls, however, is the mistrust of God. The ultimate deceit from the Slanderer is that God is the abuser and cannot be trusted. After all, is He not

the one who saw what was going on and did nothing about it? This twisted—though understandable—line of thinking shows the craftiness of the evil mastermind behind her suffering!²

She must be shown the One who also suffered unjustly at the hands of wicked men—One who does not demonstrate His love in this dispensation of time by keeping us from calamity (or else no one would die, get cancer, be double-crossed in business, or be rejected by another), but demonstrates His love by being with us (Immanuel) and sustaining us in the calamity (see Heb. 11:36ff). She must be assured that she can become “more than [a conqueror] through him that loved us” (Rom. 8:37).

Over time (often over many months of discipleship) a Spirit-taught knowledge of the love of God will be the remedy that will remove the tor-

ture of her fears (1 John 4:18) and restore her soul.

Paul’s admonition to people-helpers in 2 Timothy 2:24–26 is especially fitting. The castle walls she has built around her heart to keep intruders out also keep her heart confined to a very lonely prison. She will often not even verbalize many of her fears until the counselor has proven by months of consistent care for her that he/she is a safe person—a compassionate advocate and protector.

Secondly, Tamar was *overpowered*; Amnon violated her *personhood*.

Amnon treated Tamar as an object to be manipulated and forced to serve his own selfish, evil ends. She was helpless to resist his superior strength and position. (He commanded the servants to leave the room.)

The manipulative extent to which some predators will go is staggering. The grooming of their prey (treating her like “Daddy’s special girl”), the cunning emotional blackmail (“If you tell, I’ll deny it, and who would believe a little kid over a youth leader?” “If you tell, I’ll kill your kitten/mother/little sister, etc.” “If you tell, I’ll tell them all the things you did to me”—though he was the one who forced her to undress and perform unspeakable sexual tricks on him), and the threat of personal physical violence are unimaginable, but unfortunately, common.

The reactions vary widely with each sufferer, but two seem to be the most common. One is “I’ll never be overpowered again! No one will choose for me again. I will be in control from now on. If no one is going to look out for me, I’ll have to rely upon myself to do it.”

Control becomes a recurring theme among sufferers. Their drivenness and ambition seem commendable. They make great employees, they expend enormous energy in their duties, and their heightened level of responsibility

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may even look like spiritual dedication rather than the self-protection that it is.

The other common response to abuse is *despair*. Not only do they feel helpless, but they feel hopeless. Anyone who understands her story can sympathize with her desire to give up.

Bearing her burdens will mean constant intercession before the Blessed Controller/Sovereign (1 Tim. 6:15)—the One who can take every action of the Evil One and of evil men and turn a covering of ashes into a covering of beauty (Isa. 61:1–3). Bearing her burdens will mean being willing to be there when her world and her head are spinning in order to give her some means of stability and direction.

Helping her gain God's broader perspective of life on a fallen planet through the lives of David, Joseph, and others will be the task in the days ahead. From these examples she will learn that we are not free always to choose our circumstances, but we are always free to choose our responses to those circumstances. Again, these truths will sound cruel and heartless unless they are offered within a caring, wise context of Biblical counseling.

Thirdly, Tamar was shamed; Amnon violated her honor.

Amnon took away Tamar's *personal* honor—her virginity. She was defiled, with little or no chances of marriage. Amnon also robbed her of her *public* honor—her reputation. Amnon sent her away as if she were in some way the perpetrator.

Shame is both an objective state of having been demoted in some way and a subjective emotion of humiliation. It is the exposure that says, "I have been seen," and the evaluation that says, "I have been found unacceptable." I have seen young ladies turn to self-destructive actions such as cutting and burning as ways to punish themselves.³ They reason, "I must have done something really bad for this to happen to me. I still feel bad so I must need to be punished more." I have seen others become extremely compliant because "bad things won't happen to good girls." Still others have disassociated themselves from the "bad little girl that was being punished by Daddy." Janet, at the hands of her father's abuse, may become "Sally"—a bad, imaginary friend—as the only way to make sense out of what is happening.

We cannot fault her with any of these strategies as a young girl. Paul said it is normal to think like a child when we are children, but if we are to mature we must put away our childish thoughts and actions (1 Cor. 13:11). The stubbornness and self-protectiveness that allowed her to be a survivor will now stand in the way of her spiritual maturity if she will not see the issue and forsake it. This is a hard transition for her to make,

but a crucial one in her spiritual journey.

In addition, worldly thinking characteristically reverses God's ways. It invites the sufferer to accentuate the shame, feel it deeply, and let it motivate to action and activism. God says, "Imitate My Son who despised the shame—who diminished it in His own eyes" (Heb. 12:2). The word "despise" is the same one used in Matthew 6:24; 18:10; 1 Timothy 4:12; and 2 Peter 2:10.

God instructs us that when the shame is a result of our own sin, we must confess it. When it is the result of the sins of others against us, we must despise it. Clearly the attitude of Jesus toward shame must shape ours. The Psalms, James, and 1 Peter have much to say about the right perspective on undeserved suffering and hurt.

Lastly, Tamar was confused; Amnon violated her sense of well-being.

Tamar's reactions—putting ashes on her head, tearing her royal garments, placing her hands on her head, and crying—show great grief. Furthermore, verse 20 states that she remained "desolate" in her brother Absalom's house. The word "desolate" means confused. Many questions raced through her mind. Loose ends dangled everywhere she turned. There didn't seem to be any way to make sense of what had happened nor of what options were hers now.

Often a young girl as she matures has many questions about her *past* ("Why did I still love my brother so much even though he was using me that way?" "Why did I eventually have some physical pleasure from this when it was my dad doing it?"⁴ "Did I do something to deserve this?" "I thought I was keeping the marriage together because Dad said if he didn't do this he would have to leave the marriage because Mom wasn't meeting his needs."). The questions that arise in the mind of an adult sufferer looking back prompt much confusion.

There is often confusion about the *present*. What can she do about the nightmares and flashbacks she is still having?

What about the mental craziness she feels sometimes? How can she free herself from the addictions, emotional numbness, abusive relationships, and poor relational styles that are so much a part of her right now?

She will also be confused about the *future*. "How can anyone want me in the future? I'm damaged freight." "Am I destined to abuse *my* children?" "How much of this should my future husband know, and when must I tell him? What if my fiancé abandons me or tries to kill my brother once he finds out?"

The confusion persists, but patient Scriptural clarity can be brought into the picture in the discipleship process. She may be experiencing anger, guilt over

TWO COMMON REACTIONS:

1. "I'll never be overpowered again!"

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2. Despair.

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subsequent wrong responses, fear, anxiety, and despair. The counselor can address these issues as they surface with compassionate application of God's truth to her troubled heart.

The greatest source of help is the Comforter—the One inside her assuring her of His presence, of the trustworthiness of God's truth, of the forgiveness for her own sin, and of the hopefulness of her own future in His hands. He will use the Word presented by compassionate brothers and sisters in Christ to mature her into the likeness of the One who suffered for her offenses and who is touched by the feelings of her suffering. My greatest delight is seeing many of these dear sisters now serving the Lord at the side of compassionate husbands as loving mothers, ministry wives, Christian school teachers, business women, and insightful counselors. Only our great God can give this kind of beauty for ashes!

Dr. Jim Berg is an author, speaker, and Biblical counselor who served as dean of students of Bob Jones University for twenty-nine years until he retired from that position to become a professor at the university's Seminary and Graduate School of Religion. He and his wife, Pat, have three married daughters and ten grandchildren. His ministry website is www.JimBerg.com.



¹Though a growing number of childhood abuse sufferers are boys and young men, the majority of victims are girls and young women. In the interest of readability I will use "she" to refer to the sufferer and "he" to refer to the perpetrator, though there are a growing number of instances where the genders are reversed as well as many cases where pre-pubescent or adolescent boys are abused by men. In addition, I will generally refer to the abused person as a "sufferer" rather than a victim to accentuate the ongoing burden the child bears even after the abuse has stopped. I will also address these issues as though the sufferer were a young child or young woman—

though older women can be assaulted as well. I am also assuming that the sufferer is a born-again believer in Jesus Christ. An unregenerated person may receive comfort from discussing her suffering with a compassionate person, but she will not have the spiritual resources within herself to have a Christlike response and to grow spiritually through her pain. What she needs more than anything is to be introduced to the Gentle Savior, who bore her griefs and carried her sorrows.

²Resistance to this spiritual attack requires an acceptance and application of three key theological truths: first, God is just. Therefore He hates the sin that was perpetrated on the sufferer. He will forgive the offender who has genuinely put his faith in Christ, but God exacted (and Jesus willingly paid) the full payment of that sin at Calvary, and God demands genuine repentance from the sinner. Moreover, for all of God's mercy, He has never changed His attitude about sin. It is still hateful in His eyes. Second, God is sovereign. Therefore He is in control of everything that happens to us. This truth is essential because only a sovereign God has the ability to bring good in a sufferer's life in spite of the terrible thing that was done to her. Finally, God is good. In spite of the fact that He allows sin (including the grievous sin of child sexual abuse) to exist for a time in this world, He intends nothing but good for His children and ultimately for His universe. The relationship between these three truths is a great mystery and has been the basis of many attacks on God's existence and character. However, the counselor in kindness and patience must help the sufferer to yield to God's infinitely superior wisdom, power, and goodness and to trust Him in spite of her inability to understand the "why" of what happened to her.

³Males, particularly those sexually abused by other males, may have other shame issues, such as doubts about their masculinity. Although the Biblical principles discussed here apply to them as well, a lot more work needs to be done on helping men and boys who were the victims of sexual abuse.

⁴Physical pleasure is not the common experience of most but is present in enough situations for it to be a very real source of confusion.

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How Could It Ever Be for My Good?

If you have been abused, you carry a heavy load. Lugging the past around is exhausting, but no matter what some say, you can't simply drop it. In the daylight, names and pictures, places and faces remind you of what you're desperately trying to forget, and after dark, awful memories haunt your sleep.

Especially if you were abused as a child, before you understood that what was happening was not normal, when you were too weak to defend yourself, too young and terrified to find a way of escape, your tender heart may have been numbed for a lifetime. Those who betrayed you—by committing or by enabling the abuse—may have made it hard for you to trust again. You may be suspicious of those who say they love you, or you may find it difficult to love at all.

You may even be distrustful of God, who saw what was happening and could have stopped or prevented it but didn't. You question why One who loved you would choose not to shield you. You memorize Romans 8:28 and try to believe it, but you wonder how any good could ever result from such evil, for you find no blessing in your memories, no escape from your heartache.

I can't answer all your questions or even fully understand your suffering, for I have not been where you are. But I can stand beside you as a friend. Let's move away from the bitter edge of your pain and look together for the good that can come from it. It's true that "all things work

Like Him, you suffered innocently. That's what the cross was all about. He "did no sin" (1 Pet. 2:22) but was tortured and left to bleed and die alone.

together for good." But the following verse explains what that good is: "to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29). Few life experiences have as much power to move you toward that goal as experiencing abuse and handling it as He did.

Jesus knows what it means to suffer for others' wrongdoing. It doesn't seem fair that someone should hurt you so deeply and then leave you wounded by the road as he goes on his merry way through life with no signs of guilt or remorse, no desire to make things right or recompense you for your loss of innocence. The abuser did the sinning, but you have done the suffering.

You are not sinless like the Savior, but you did not cause, deserve, or desire your abuse. Like Him, you suffered innocently. That's what the cross was all about. He "did no sin" (1 Pet. 2:22) but was tortured and left to bleed and die alone. Multitudes still pass Him by—all the way into eternity—without caring or even noticing that it was their sin that caused His torment. And while the Son was being "wounded for our transgressions . . . bruised for our iniquities," the Father saw and allowed it to continue. "It pleased the Lord to bruise him" (Isa. 53:5, 10), not because He was cruel or unfeeling, but because He had a greater purpose in mind.

So when you come to Jesus with the anguish of abuse and your sense of separation from the Father, Jesus understands. Draw near to Him, knowing that He is "touched with the feeling of [your] infirmities" (Heb. 4:15). As you share in "the fellowship of his sufferings" (Phil. 3:10), you will gradually but surely grow into His likeness.

Jesus also knows what it means to forgive. If your abuser has asked you for forgiveness, you've already discovered how hard that is. Forgiving is expensive, for it requires forfeiting the right to retaliate. It also asks you to absolve guilt for something you



can never forget. Even the death of an unrepentant abuser is costly, for with him dies any possibility of reconciliation. Death removes the abuser but not the pain, leaving you with the need to show mercy in your spirit toward someone who showed no remorse.

But Colossians 3:13 makes Him our model for forgiving: "Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." How does He forgive? Fully, immediately, and unconditionally. When by His grace and in His miraculous strength you are able to forgive like that, you do what is humanly impossible and take another giant step toward Christlikeness.

And as you grow into His image, you'll be able to help other hurting women with insight and credibility, for you sense and understand their trials, just as the One who took on human flesh understands yours. The One "who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble" (2 Cor. 1:4) will swing open new doors of ministry for you.

Your past may always be a heavy load, but you can lighten it by shifting your focus from what happened to you back then to what the Lord is doing in you right now. Abuse is not good, but growing into His likeness is good. It is very, very good.

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Raising Servants of God

"My hands are already full taking care of my toddlers. I could never take on a ministry right now."

"I used to be super involved in visitation and other outreaches, but now I'm just a stay-at-home mom."

"I can't wait until my kids are older so I can be more involved in church."

Have you ever heard a young mother make any of these comments? Have you ever heard these words come out of your own mouth? I often hear mothers of young children express feelings of being handicapped in their service to the Lord because they now have children to care for. Yes, after caring for your husband, your children are, and should be, top priority. As mothers, our primary mission is to evangelize and then disciple the little heathens God places in our charge. *However, how will we raise servants of God if they do not see us serving? How will they learn to sacrifice for others*

if all we ever do is sacrifice for them all day? There are many creative ways you can teach your children to love and serve others while still maintaining your priorities in their proper order.

When our first two were little, any excursion out of the house was a welcome treat for this young mother. We enjoyed spending time with an elderly widow lady, keeping her company on shopping trips and helping her pull weeds in her garden. It was a mutual blessing those times when our car was out of commission and she needed someone to drive for her! During the week, our little ones had a ball playing in the nursery while I cleaned the church. Teaching VBS, children's church, or youth Sunday school with a baby in my arms was not an uncommon sight. My toddlers "helped" me make Christmas cookies for our neighbors, doctors, and the local fire fighters. My husband and I pushed the double stroller while going on weekly door-to-door visitation. All these things were just a natural part of our family life.

Nevertheless, when our third child was born, it complicated things a bit. For some reason, God did not choose to give me a third arm when He gave me a third child! With a three-year-old, a just-turned-two-year-old, and a newborn, I found it difficult to go anywhere without some kind of incident. So I asked the Lord what I could do. He showed me that if I can't go minister, then why not bring the min-



istry to my home? “Be not forgetful [do not neglect] to entertain strangers . . .” (Heb. 13:2). From then on, our front door became a revolving one. With the help and support of my husband, we had all kinds of people over at least once a week. We served them on everything from Dixie paper plates to our finest china, whether we were living in temporary housing with barely any furniture or a tiny duplex. My reward was not just an opportunity to serve, but to get to carry on a conversation with other adults!

Eight years later, I find myself in a different season of motherhood. This season does not involve scheduling my days around naptimes, feeding times, and diaper changes but rather homeschooling, piano lessons, art class, and soccer games. With this new season are new opportunities. We still invite people over quite often, but I can also take advantage of other moments. During soccer games, we mingle with the parents and work on building relationships. We take every opportunity to witness to the kids’ piano teacher. During art class I go with one of the other moms to a nearby coffee shop, and we do a Bible study

together. The other day, art class was cancelled, so our kids had a “play date” while we studied the Bible at the kitchen table. Believe it or not, even with seven children from age twelve to age two running through the kitchen every other minute, we had a sweet time of fellowship around God’s Word.

Despite what it may look like on paper, I’m no Supermom. I’m just an ordinary person who happens to love God and love my children.

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Our mandate is to preach the gospel to *every creature*, whether great or small, young or old. So, whatever stage of life you find yourself in right now, I encourage you to prayerfully create opportunities for service.

Don’t look for excuses *not* to become engaged in others’ lives; look for excuses to show you care!

Amy Greenwood and her husband, James, are church-planting missionaries in Buenos Aires, Argentina. They have three children. You can read more about their ministry at www.IndependentBaptistArgentina.org.



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“Dad, We Need to Talk”

A Concerned Pastor and Father

“Dad, we need to talk.” In our family we had many conversations that began the same way. This time, this conversation would change everything. In the course of this conversation I learned that my child was the victim of one man’s perverted lusts. The perpetrator was not a relative or a neighbor but one of the most active and trusted members of our church.

This is a conversation that I never imagined having with one of my children. We homeschooled, we worked together in the ministry, and we sheltered them from worldly influences. In other words, we did all the things we thought parents were supposed to do to protect and shield our children.

I carefully questioned my child on the details of the abuse. The more my child revealed the more sick and angry I became. In the course of our conversation I found out that the abuse had been going on for some time but my child was afraid to tell us, fearing how this would affect us and our church. When I asked about times and places I learned that some incidents of the abuse had occurred at church, the place where every member of our family had invested much of our lives.

This news set in motion a whirlwind series of events that included local law enforcement, immediate steps to insure there were no other victims and that there would be no other victims, a face-to-face meeting with the abuser, church discipline, and seeking prayer and counsel from godly friends.

Going through this has revealed some disturbing yet common failures and naiveté. This is one of those sins we don’t talk about, but we should. The statistics are alarming. The officer helping us with the case warned us that churches are prime targets for child predators. Again, the officer in charge of our case informed us that our child was certainly not alone; one in three girls and one in six boys are victims of abuse. According to these statistics, it is likely that on any given Sunday morning we who are pastors look into the faces of both abusers and those who have suffered abuse.

The reason I wish to share some of our story is not so that I can give you a procedure to follow for dealing with these situations. There are plenty of resources and people more qualified for that than I am. I want to open your eyes to the very personal and painful side of this issue.

From the time my child first shared the news about the abuse to even now I still have a sense of “this couldn’t happen to my family.” But it did happen. One of the most painful questions I ask myself over and over is, “As a pastor and, more importantly, as a father, how could I let this happen?” This question opens the door for other questions. “Did I not have enough protections in place?” “Did I, in

some way, put my child in danger?” “Did I trust this person too much?” “What signs were there that I missed?” The questions could go on and on, and I think that is exactly what Satan wants. In essence every one of my questions strikes at the issue of God’s good, gracious, and sovereign control of all things.

My wife and I and our child, at the time and for some time after all that happened, received caring and godly counsel. My child is doing remarkably well, better than I do most of the time, having determined that God will use this for good and to glorify Himself. My child is convinced that there will be ministry opportunities that he or she would not have had otherwise.

There were times when we all had severe struggles. As you would expect, there have been battles with bitterness and distrust. One of the most difficult struggles for my child was when we found out that our local law enforcement decided not to press charges against the abuser. My child was willing to testify in order to protect other children from facing the same heartache. The authorities, though, did not want my child to become courtroom fodder. By not pressing charges my child was afraid that what had happened could happen to another child. Here was an opportunity for us all to learn a difficult lesson in trusting God to always do what is right and good.

It is what we all learned about our God through this that has made any of it bearable. We know God could have stopped the abuse. We know what happened isn’t “fair.” We know there will be memories that bring up more questions. We also know that we live in a fallen, sin-cursed world. We know that God will always love us. We know that God never does wrong. We know that God knows how all our lives can bring Him greatest glory. We know our loving, perfect, gracious God can be trusted.

Let me share just one more important lesson we learned. Listen to children. We knew our child was telling the truth, but some questioned that. We didn’t blame those who questioned but always felt uneasy with how easy it was for some to dismiss outright what our child was saying. This doubt is not unusual. We were told that, on average, a child will tell nine people about the abuse before he or she is believed.

Abuse is sometimes more a part of our lives than we are willing to admit. It happened to me a few decades ago. Half of the friends from whom I sought counsel had been abused as young people. We ought to be talking about this in our staff meetings and pastors’ fellowships. We ought to be preparing to effectively minister to those being abused and the abusers who are willing to get help.

“Dad, we need to talk.” I am so glad we did!